

ARE THE GOSPELS WORD OF GOD ?

Woe, then to those who write the Book with their own hands, and then say, this is from God."—Qur'an 11:75.

The fact that the Christian Gospels are but biographies of Jesus Christ affords sufficient ground for maintaining that they are not the word of God. The task of recording the events of the life of Jesus Christ could not in any way stand in need of the help of Revelation, for they were already known both to the friends and enemies of Jesus. By Revelation God makes known to a Soul truths which were un-known to it before. Why should St. Mark for instance require the help of Revelation in penning down "truths" which were already known to him and to others through the instruction given by St. Peter? It is well known to the students of the New Testament that St. Mark, who was a convert of St. Peter was employed by the latter to interpret his lectures on the life of Jesus delivered to his audiences at Rome (1 Peter 5: 13). A series of these lectures formed an account of the words and works of Jesus. Those among the Romans who were interested in this narration compelled St Mark to commit to paper what he, as interpreter of St. Peter, had described to them. Accordingly he wrote down in Greek what St. Peter had said in Aramaic. Could any person think for a moment that this Greek version written by Mark of the account of the life of Jesus is the word of God? Evidently not. Neither Peter nor Mark himself had any idea that piety would turn their story of the life of Jesus into a Sacred Scripture. For St. Mark, who wrote from memory and wrote in Greek, could "no more than reproduce the substance of St. Peter's preaching (vide Commentary to Rev. J. R. Dumlew of Cambridge p. 722) St. Peter on the other hand "used to frame his teaching to meet the immediate wants of his hearers" (Dumlew, p. 722). What is to-day, known as Mark's Gospel was known in ancient times as "Memoirs of Peter" which title developed it self into "Peter's Gospel." St. Peter who adopted his preaching to "the immediate wants of his hearers did not believe that a Greek Version of his adopted discourses delivered in Aramaic was the word of God, neither did Mark nor his hearers, nor early Christians who called his

narrative by the name of "Memoirs of Peter". It would be of interest to reproduce here the remarks of Rev. Dumlew as made on p. 722 of his famous Commentary on the Bible. He says:—"The direct authorship of these coned Gospel by St. Mark has never been disputed in the church, and even modern negative criticism is disposed to regard him as the author of at least the nucleus of the present Gospel. In ancient times it was sometimes alluded to as "Memoirs of Peter" or "Peter's Gospels" it being the common opinion that St. Mark did no more than reproduce the substance of St. Peter's preaching. The most ancient witness, the apostolic Presbyter whose sayings are recorded by Papias about 130 A. D. gives the following important testimony. "Mark having become (or having been) Peter's interpreter, wrote all that he remembered (or all that Peter related) though he did not (record) in order that which was said or done by Christ. For neither he heard the Lord nor followed Him; but subsequently as I said (attached himself) to Peter, who used to frame his teaching to meet the (immediate) wants (of his hearers) and not making a connected narration of the Lord's discourses. So Mark committed no error as he wrote down some particulars as he recalled them to mind. For he took heed to one thing—to omit none of the facts that he heard, and to state nothing falsely in (his narrative of) them".

The same author writes further:—"The oldest witness, Irenæus (177 A. D.) says "after the decease of Peter and Paul, Mark the disciple and interpreter of Peter himself also delivered to us in writing the substance of Peter's preaching. But a witness nearly as ancient, Clement of Alexandria, says "when Peter had preached the word publicly in Rome and by the spirit had declared the Gospel, his hearers who were numerous exhorted Mark, as one who had followed him a long time, and remembered what he said, to write down his words. Accordingly Mark composed the Gospel and circulated it among those who asked him to write it. When Peter heard of it, he neither hindered nor encouraged the work."

This is the brief account of the manner and method in which Mark's Life of Jesus which was latter given the title of Gospel, was composed and this shows clearly that it is far from being a revealed account. Neither Mark nor Peter, much less their hearers and early Christians, looked upon it as the Word of God.

THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM.

A comparative study of the Gospels reveals that the Gospel of Mathew, Mark and Luke present much of the matter which is identically the same in all the three. This presentation of the same general view of the Ministry of Jesus has given rise to what is called the "Synoptic Problem," *i. e.* a problem which undertakes to discuss and explain why all the three different writers should "record, for the most part, the same incidents in the same order, in the same words, and from the same point of view." The only explanation which the Orthodox doctors and scholars offer, as the result of prolonged investigations extending over more than a century is, that St. Mark is the oldest of the Synoptics, and has been used by St. Mathew, and St. Luke, who have incorporated the bulk of his Gospel into their own with comparatively few alterations" (Dumlew's Commentary, page 73), St. Luke himself confirms this view in the introductory remarks of his Gospel (1:1-4:—

(1) For as much as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us.

(2) Even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were eye witnesses and ministers of the word.

(3) It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus.

(4) That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:1-4).

These four verses of the first chapter of St. Luke confess that the sources which St. Luke employed for his own composition were both oral and written and whatever he wrote was already current among the people in the form of traditions or documents and was "most surely believed" among the Christians. St. Luke does not claim to have been inspired much less to have held communion with God or to have learnt "truths through Revelation." On the contrary he affirms the views held by the orthodox Christian scholars that the Gospels of Matnew, Mark and Luke are synoptical on account of their authors having borrowed from one another. Rev. Dumlew observes that "when St. Luke wrote, a large number of written accounts of our Lord's life and work already existed (St. Luke 1:1-4) and it

is to be supposed that he made diligent use of them.....of written sources he almost certainly used St. Mark's Gospel (p. 734) and writing about the sources of St. Mathew's Gospel, Rev. Dumlew remarks that altogether St Mathew has about 470 verses out of a total of 1088 verses, parallel to St. Mark; that is, he borrowed nearly half his Gospel from St. Mark" (page 618).

In a word the discussion and explanation of the synoptic problem proves beyond doubt that St. Mathew and St. Luke incorporated into their Gospels much of the matter contained in St. Mark; and St. Mark has been shown to be nothing more than a reproduction from memory of the lectures of St. Peter adopted for the good of the Romans. This historical account shows conclusively that the Gospels are not at all a Revealed Word of God (St. John's Gospels are not a biography, but an allegorical explanation of the tenets expounded in the three Gospels).

CONTENTS OF THE GOSPELS.

The contents of the Gospels speak for themselves. The two different genealogies of Jesus as given in Mathew and Luke, and two different accounts of the nativity of Jesus as given by them are but human attempts to describe the pedigree and birth of Jesus. The pedigree and birth of Jesus were known to his countrymen exactly as the pedigree and the birth of any mortal are known to his countrymen. These portion of the Gospels cannot therefore claim to be Revelation. The wonder is that both Mathew and Luke commit blunders in their construction of genealogies and in their descriptions of the birth. For instance Mathew says (1:16 that Jacob was the father of Joseph, while Luke mentions (3:23) Heli to be his father. This is an unaccountable blunder. Again Mathew says (1:12) that Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, while according to Luke the Salathiel's real father was Neri. Again St. Mathew traces the Davidic descent of Jesus through Suleman while Luke does so through Nathan.

So far as the description of nativity goes, Mathew says that the angel of the Lord appeared unto Joseph (1:20), while Luke (1:26) asserts that the angel Gabriel was sent from God to Mary. This part of description of nativity provides occasion for the writers to display their difference in doctrinal views. But with regard to the place of birth there could not be any two opinions. Mathew represents

Bethlehem as the original home of Joseph and Mary while Luke mentions Nazareth as their home town. These instances of radical inconsistencies discredit the accounts of Mathew and Luke. Each of them thinks more of suiting his version to his religious views than of being faithful. Mathew writing for the Jews presents everything in the light of Jewish traditions and prejudices, while Luke's writing for the Gentiles, refutes doctrinal views held by St. Mathew. Mathew held with Peter that only the "circumcised" could enter the kingdom of God, while Luke, as a follower of Paul, maintained that the kingdom of God was open to the "circumcised" as well as to the uncircumcised. In a word Mathew is through and through Jewish, narrow and bigotted, while Luke is broadminded, their views which are widely different, colour their narratives and thus render them unfaithful and unreliable, not to say that their narratives are the word of God.

Before proceeding to examine further contents of the Gospels I should stop to point out an amusing fact. Mathew says that "from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations;" but in his genealogy he has actually given thirteen generations and not fourteen. Rev. Dumlew admits that the statement observes that "probably a name has dropped out (p. 624)." Mathew lacks accuracy either in giving generations or in remarking that the number of generations is fourteen.

Now for the contents in general. Each of the Gospels gives a picture of Jesus in fashion as he lived, going about, feeling weary, teaching, rebuking, doing good, blessing, feeling hungry and angry, feeling sorrowful, fasting, and praying, falling into the hands of his enemies and finally being crucified. This picture of the life of Jesus as given in the Gospels tells eloquently that the life of Jesus is a narration of incidents and events as occurred before the eyes of hundreds of people, both friends and foes and as such has no claim to be the Word of God, no more than if a claim were made for the life of Napoleon to be the Word of God.

An exception should however be made so far as the teachings of Jesus are concerned. His teachings would contain the Word of God. Such portions as contain his teachings and prophecies can justly be looked upon as Divine. But beyond this, it would be sheer credulity to hold that an account of the incidents of the life of the Holy Prophet Jesus should be looked upon as sacred Scripture.

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE.

Even those modern scholars of the Gospels, who are through and through Christian, who hold orthodox views, and whose profound scholarship is universally admitted, do not believe that the Gospels are the Word of God. Rev Dumlew's popular commentary of the Bible is recommended by the orthodox clergy and is sold by all the Bible Societies. We call this commentary to give its evidence. Its evidence is as follows :

“The work of the scholar who seeks to know the mind of the New Testament writers is much more difficult than similar work in the Old Testament. To begin with, the writers of the Gospel's report in Greek (although they may have had some Aramaic sources) the sayings of Jesus Christ, who for the most part probably spoke Aramaic, nor is it likely that those writers or their copyists had any idea that their records would go beyond the early Churches, with which they themselves were familiar. The same applies to St. Paul. His letters, now so valued, were messages intended only for the churches to which they were addressed. Those who first copied them would not regard them as at all sacred in our sense of the word. Nor even in later centuries do we find that scrupulous regard for the sacred text which marked the transmission of the old Testaments. *A copyist would sometimes put in not what was in the next, but what he thought to be in it.* (Italics are ours). He would trust a fickle memory, or he would even make the text accord with the views of the school to which he belonged. Besides this an enormous number of copies is preserved. In addition to the versions and quotations from the early Christian Fathers, nearly four thousand Greek Mss of the new Testament are known to exist. As a result the variety of readings is considerable.” (Dumlew's Commentary p. XVI.)

“The human element can be recognised in the materials employed by the sacred writers and in the manner in which they are combined. The writers used various sources of information as modern writers do.”

“The human element can be recognised in those occasional statements which appear to be inaccuracies. St. Jerome says plainly that there is an error in Mathew 13:35 and 27:9, points which are well known to modern students; when different narratives have been combined, we find some apparent contradictions.” (P. C. XXXII).

“ We must not regard the Bible as an absolutely perfect book, in which God is Himself the author using human hands and brains only as a man might use a typewriter, God used men not machines—men with like weaknesses and prejudice and passion as ourselves.....In some parts as the Gospels, there is more of divine; in others, as the Chronicles, more of the human. It is as a mine of precious ore where the gold is mingled with rock and claythe ore is richer in one part than another but all the parts in some degree are glittering with gold. It is as sunlight through a painted window.....the light must come to it as coloured by the medium, we cannot get it in any other way... It is foolish to ignore the medium, through which the light has come ” (p. CXXXV). The learned evidence is too clear and lucid to require any further remarks.

INTERPOLATIONS.

There are innumerable interpolations in the Gospel. But I shall confine this paper to a few of them. It is generally admitted that the last verse of the seventh chapter and the first eleven verses of the eighth chapter of St John's Gospel have been added to it and that they cannot be recognised as parts of their original text. Bishop Dr. Westcott and Dr. Hort who have placed the Christian world under a debt of obligation by preparing in Greek a valuable edition of the New Testament, after collecting all available manuscripts remark that John 7:53 8:1-11 is an interpolation and therefore this passage “has no right to a place in the Text of the Fourth Gospel ” (p. 299 of the larger edition of Westcott and Hort's Greek New Testament). Accordingly Ferrer Fenton has expunged this passage from his English edition which he had offered to the Christian public after hard research work extending over fifty years. Rev. Dumlew's commentary remarks on this passage that “all modern critics agree that this section is no original part of the Fourth Gospel ” (p. 788).

Similarly all modern critics agree that the last twelve verses of the last chapter of Mark are not by St. Mark and never formed part of the original Mark. Rev. Dumlew, says that “the most probable account of the literary history of the section seems to be the following. The Gospel of St. Mark being the first extensive and authoritative account of our Lord's life, as distinguished from his discourses, attained at its first publication (55—60 A. D.) a considerable circulation, first in the West and afterwards in the

East. At that time it concluded with an account of the Gallilean appearance which is now only to be found in St. Mathew (Mt. 28—16). The subsequent publication of the First and Third Gospels, which incorporated practically its whole subject-matter and were far more interesting as containing discourses practically drew it out of circulation. When at the close of the apostolic age an attempt was made (probably at Rome) to collect the authentic memorials of the Apostles and their companions, a copy of the neglected Second Gospel was not easily found. The one that was actually discovered and was used to multiply copies, had lost its last leaf, and so a fitting termination (the present appended) was added by another hand. A recently discovered Armenian Ms. (1891) definitely ascribes the appendix to Aresto, *i. e.*, probably Arestion—a disciple of the Lord mentioned by Papias, (p. 735),” again an amusing instance of an appendix is met with in John 21:24 which declares on behalf of the Ephesian elders who published the Gospel that the Gospel is authentic and has been written by John. The attestation now forms part of the text. The verse runs thus:—“This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.” The word “we” refers to Ephesian elders who published the Gospel and declared it authentic. This reminds us of parallel case in the Old Testament. The 5th book of Moses which is believed to have been written by Moses, described the death of Moses. “So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab.” (Deut 34:5). This could not have been written down by Moses himself. Neither could have John himself written this attestation.” This is the disciple which testifieth of these things and wrote these things and we know that his testimony is true.” (John 21:24).

These interpolations are evidently not the word of God.

In a word the research work of today confirms what was revealed over thirteen centuries ago to the Holy Prophet in the following verses:—

“Woe, then, to those who write the Book with their own hands and then say.” This is from God. (Quran 11:75.)

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